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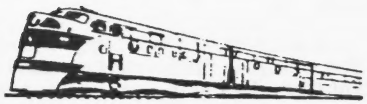
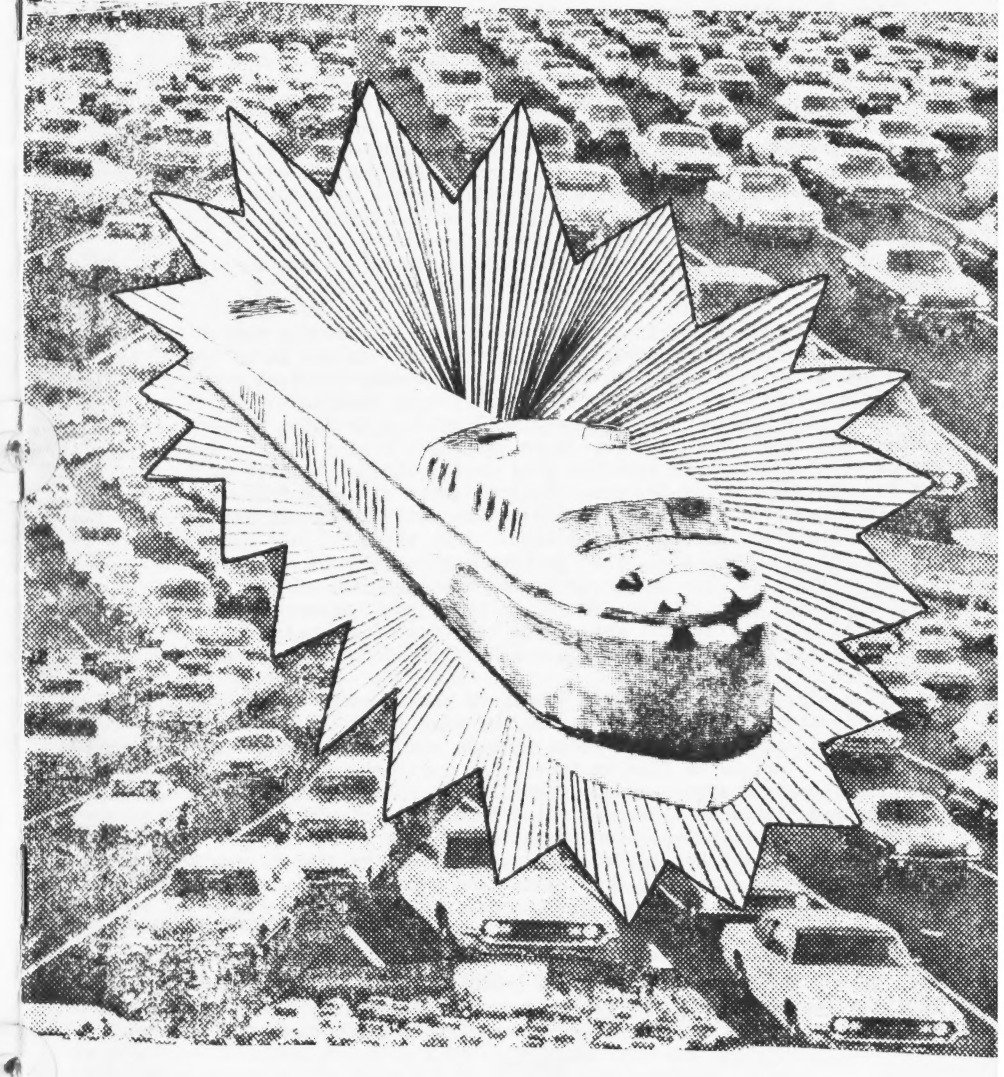
RAIL TRAVEL newsletter



Vol. 2 No. 1
January 3, 1972 #27



Rail Travel Redux

EDITORIAL

1972

The new year opens, and we face a replay of the uncertainties and frustrations of a year ago. Only there is a difference now. Whereas one year ago we saw the preliminary "Railpax" map handed to us, cutting out some of the most important railroad service in the country, and with no assurance from government bureaucrats that rail travel would be given any more than lip service, we at least now have Amtrak and have some idea of the aims and expertise of the corporation. Rail service is better and more extensive than we could have expected at the end of 1970. But once again the question of Amtrak funding is up before Congress, and the same dichotomy of approaches to rail service crops up in the arguments presented.

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Caught in the middle are Amtrak, as well as America's rail travelers, who must do with a compromise system when all around them they watch the highway lobby destroy the nation in a strangling octopus of concrete, urban blight and pollution. Amtrak is handed the near-impossible task of showing a demand for passenger trains while being denied enough resources even to properly make the latent demand manifest.

It is said that people will tolerate anything as long as there is hope for change. And fortunately we do have hope. There is hope that the sentiment in Congress is for Amtrak to continue. (As of this writing, the Senate has completed hearings and drafted a bill approving Amtrak's $170 million additional funding and extending the life of the basic system two years--until 1975. The House, however, is dragging its feet, and was still holding hearings when it adjourned for Christmas vacation.)

Even more hopeful than Congressional actions to date, however, is the groundswell of grassroots interest in passenger trains that we have perceived growing gradually over the past months since the start of Amtrak. Out here in California--the most populous state of the Union--we frequently feel isolated from the real passenger train action, when we have good reason to be an important part of that action. Take the "corridor" between Los Angeles and San Francisco. This is the most heavily traveled air corridor in the nation. It also carries a lot of auto traffic, via highway 101 and I-5. If we had a nickel for every time we've heard someone here say "I'm driving to Los Angeles next week. How I hate that drive, but I've got to go," we'd have enough money to place a half-tone engraving on each page of each issue of RTN.

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James Russell, Editor

Richard Tower, Research Editor — Steve Farrar, East Coast Representative
Paul Rayton, Editor-at-Large — Michael Cohen, Artist

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The East Coast saw smooth-running operations and heavy loads of happy passengers on the fast and luxurious trains assigned to that part of the country (see EAST COAST REPORT, p. 6). Amtrak announced in a press release Dec. 22 that it was "preparing for the expected surge in travelers over the Christmas-New Year's holiday" by increasing passenger cars by 40%, running extra trains on heavy routes, and adding more personnel. It said 368 cars were rented to make up 28 extra trains "in the East and Midwest."

The biggest problems arose in the Western half of the U.S. Travelers were informed about Dec. 15 that the major Western long-distance trains were virtually sold out for the entire holiday season, and that not even waiting lists would be made up. Chicago's central reservations office on that date closed up the lists for both trains to California, for the EMPIRE BUILDER on key vacation dates, and likewise the BROADWAY LIMITED, NORTH COAST HIAWATHA, and FLORIDIAN.

The SUNSET LIMITED, train no. 1, was said to be sold out before Christmas and passengers in Texas were turned away. However, the train came thru with empty seats and bedrooms, reportedly because of errors in making reservations.

But the biggest shock of all to West Coast observers was the on-time performance of trains there. Here are performance data on all arriving trains at Los Angeles (except the SAN DIEGANS) for the entire period, Dec. 19 thru Jan. 2:

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("On time" is within 10 mins.) Of the 7 trains from Seattle, not one arrived on time, and the earliest was 1 hr 47 mins late, the latest 4 hrs 37 mins, with the average being 3 hrs 11 mins late. In spite of this poor performance, the trains were well patronized (the only count we have on the route is northbound at Oakland Jan. 2, when 585 paid riders were aboard into that station--and the train left 1 hr late). Reasons for the delays appeared to be primarily an accumulation of various snafus such as equipment breakdowns, slowness in changing and refueling engines at connecting railroad points, and just general sluggishness of personnel at stops.

Habitual lateness of train 11-12 at Los Angeles created two other important problems. The connection with the eastbound SUPER CHIEF could not be made--the latter was not held over an hour--so that many passengers had to be placed in hotels at Amtrak's expense. In order to attempt to make the connection for travelers from north of L.A., SP taxied passengers from Oakland and south to Continental Trailways buses to make the trip to L.A. by highway and thereby catch the SUPER CHIEF.

The second problem was that the only evening train L.A.-San Diego is the late-running STARLIGHT or DAYLIGHT. Scheduled to leave 7:15pm and arrive 10:10pm, the train would leave bands of impatient passengers milling about the L.A. station with no word of its arrival time. And it meant reaching San Diego as late as 2:30am. For the traveler over that 128-mile route, the degree of unreliability was intolerable. (The other SAN DIEGANS, many riders complained, were packed with standees, since adequate equipment was not at hand.)

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One very vocal traveler was Congressman Lionel Van Deerlin, a San Diegan who is on the House Interstate and Foreign Commerce Committee, hearing Amtrak's request for $170 million more funding. He came cross-country by train Jan. 1 and arrived in L.A. Jan. 5, 13 hours late. His tale of delays on the SUNSET LIMITED ended with the remark that "There is no evidence at all that things are any better under Amtrak than they were under the old system. And that must change if they are to see any of the $170 million." He charged that SP is "simply incapable" of running trains properly, and said that Amtrak "should not get a penny until they prove they're running the ship."

In Chicago, business was heavy. The following passenger counts are estimates correct within 10%. January 1: PANAMA LTD. #59, 600 riders; January 2: ABE LINCOLN #302, 230 heading north, plus other thru riders; LAKE SHORE #61, 200; SUPER CHIEF #4, 420; EMPIRE BUILDER #8, 270; WOLVERINE #361, 170; EMPIRE BUILDER #7, 175 boarding; LAKE SHORE #60, 100 boarding; NORTH COAST HIAWATHA #10, 410; BROADWAY LTD., 190 boarding; ST. CLAIR #362, 180; DENVER ZEPHYR-CITY OF SF #5, 300 boarding; HIAWATHA service #325, 40 boarding; ABE LINCOLN #303, 350 boarding, 40 detraining, 15 thru; TEXAS CHIEF #15, 400 boarding; ILLINOIS ZEPHYR #347, 365; SUPER CHIEF #3, 225; HIAWATHA service #327, 40 boarding.

GREYHOUND TO LOBBY AGAINST AMTRAK

Amtrak's fare cuts in the Northeast Corridor prompted the president of Greyhound in the East to inform its 10,000 employees to write their Congressmen protesting Amtrak's request for more money. The early December announcement called Amtrak's moves a threat to the employees' jobs.

MENK SOFTENS HIS LINE AGAINST PASSENGER TRAINS

Louis Menk, head of BN and an Amtrak board chairman, in response to NARP's criticism of his terming trains "stagecoaches" that should "die an honorable death" (see RTN #25), has come forth with a more conciliatory statement. "I and some other railroad men have been criticized by a few passenger train enthusiasts," he said, "for stating our honestly held conviction that long distance Amtrak trains will not be profitable." He called trains a "money-losing yet socially necessary service." He added that "it is unrealistic for passenger train enthusiasts, congress or anyone else to suppose that (passenger service) can be done at a profit. Neither the national highway network nor the U.S. merchant marine operates at a profit. Yet both are considered worth their dollar cost in terms of overall benefits provided." He claimed that BN "is firmly behind Amtrak and trying hard to help the new company succeed."

AMTRAK DISCONTINUES THE LAKE SHORE

January 4 saw the last runs of the Buffalo-Chicago via Cleveland trains. Making good its threat, Amtrak cut off the service when 4 of the 5 states the train crosses failed to come up with their share of the $3.6 million costs so far. The train began running May 10 with the provision that the states would share any losses, but so far only Ohio has come up with a means of reimbursement. Roger Lewis of Amtrak will meet with the governors of all the states except Indiana to try to find a solution.

JOURNAL RAISES SPECTER OF NATIONALIZATION

The Wall Street Journal (Jan. 6) reports that the Administration is seriously looking at the possibility of nationalization of the railroads. Under secretary of transportation James M. Beggs is quoted as saying "It's conceivable that we will propose some kind of nationalization." If it happens, it would likely grow out of Penn Central's problems.

Meanwhile, three former Penn Central executives have been arrested on criminal charges of fraud connected with the financial collapse of the railroad.

A HARD LINE TOWARD PASSENGER TRAINS

by James Russell

President B. F. Biaggini

Benjamin F. Biaggini, president of the Southern Pacific Transportation Company, in an important copyrighted interview appearing in U.S. News and World Report January 3, has apparently established himself as the most outspoken foe of rail travel in the U.S.

In order to give some alternate views, we will analyze his comments about passenger trains. We believe it is important to do so, since many of his statements seem to be serious misjudgments of the true situation.

* FUTURE OF RAIL SERVICE: Mr. Biaggini thinks there will be none within 10 years, except in "a place like the Northeast Corridor." This is a sweeping judgment to make without supporting evidence. A more candid reply might be that he hopes there will be none on his rail lines, so that his company's long-held policy might not be disrupted.

* AMTRAK'S FUNCTION: To "preside over an orderly shrinkage" of service. Mr. Biaggini has a different view than Amtrak. The corporation sees its role as insuring the "survival and eventual expansion" of service. Mr. Biaggini seems to view the corporation as a means of channeling public funds towards a more efficient completion of its work of eliminating passenger trains.

* LONG-DISTANCE TRAINS: Mr. Biaggini is quite explicit about this (see QUOTES, p. 15). It's difficult to reconcile his views with the facts of the recent holiday season, however, when there simply weren't enough trains to handle the demand for long distance travel.

* TRAINS VS. AIRPLANES: The businessman cannot afford the time to go by train, says Biaggini, and businessmen are the "bread and butter" of transportation. Ironically, the very weekend the magazine bearing his words was being distributed to dealers, Mr. Biaggini's superior, Chairman of the Board D. J. Russell (no relation to your editor) was traveling in his luxurious, company-supplied private railroad car "Sunset," on Amtrak trains 5&6, and, a week later, on trains 13&14. Perhaps Mr. Biaggini has in mind to establish an aristocracy within our society, in which only wealthy businessmen travel by train, while the common man must forget the trains which his own tax dollar has helped to phase out.

* AUTO-TRAIN'S FUTURE: Mr. Biaggini doubts that it has one, but adds in a rather condescending manner, "but let them go ahead and experiment." There's really little one can add to that statement. Perhaps Mr. Biaggini has not been following events too closely lately. He also feels an auto-train wouldn't work on the West Coast, but doesn't explain why.

* LOS ANGELES-SAN FRANCISCO SERVICE: Mr. Biaggini feels that highways are so good in the West that trains won't work. He says the climate is different and one can get around easily by car. He prefers buses on reserved freeway lanes for public transit. Again the irony arises that as his words were being disseminated, auto travelers were being stranded in the snow on I-5, the major L.A.-S.F. route, and enormous pileups of vehicles were beginning as the yearly ground fog settled in on the route.

* COMMUTER TRAINS: Finally, Mr. Biaggini is opposed to commuter trains. He says there isn't much commuter service left in the U.S., and it's been unprofitable everywhere except possibly Chicago. He dislikes public ownership of commuter systems, but admits that "this is what is happening." Yes, Mr. Biaggini, this is what is happening.

East Coast Report by Steve Farrar

DEC. 17 was a good day to be alive and at trackside in Richmond, Va., for it marked the first run of the FLORIDA SPECIAL under Amtrak and the first day of operation for thru Boston-Florida cars. And, too, there was a surprising consist on the Auto-Train that night.

Arriving at Broad St. Station shortly before 7pm, we noticed workers busily installing mattresses and linen in three RF&P sleepers which had been out of use for several months. The cars were for that night's Auto-Train, due to leave Richmond's Acca Yard at 9:55. Three sleepers had been added to the Auto-Train at Richmond the previous night also.

The FLORIDA SPECIAL thundered in 8mins late, and featured an eye-popping consist: 3 SCL E units, SCL baggage-dorm, 2 UP leg-rest coaches, SCL diner, UP coach, SCL coach, BN slumbercoach, Amtrak recreation-lounge, SCL sleeper, UP sleeper, another SCL diner, SCL sleeper, UP sleeper, and an SCL ex-SILVER METEOR Sun Lounge sleeper. Both male and female Amtrak passenger representatives detrained and went up the ramp to welcome Richmond passengers aboard. The latter wore the new Amtrak uniform.

The Amtrak recreation lounge was an ex-SUNSET LIMITED full lounge (most recently run on the COAST STARLIGHT/DAYLIGHT before refurbishing). It was redecorated reportedly by Kratville of Omaha. Outside, all SP markings had been removed, and the stainless steel was relieved only by a square Amtrak sign toward one end. Inside, the car was nothing less than fantastic. There was new inch-thick wall-to-wall carpeting (blue & deep green), four new Sony 17-in color TVs, wood paneling, deep blue upholstery, and a black leather armrest on the bar.

The FLORIDA SPECIAL dinner menu from the first class diner is reprinted here (reportedly the coach diner had a different menu). The A la Carte half of the menu was equally attractive.

Table d'Hote Dinner

Midget Gherkins Hearts of Celery Rosebud Radishes

Choice
French Onion Soup, Cheese Crouton
Consomme of Beef, Creole
Shrimp Cocktail, Seafood Sauce
Chilled Tomato or V-8 Juice -- Florida Fresh Fruit Cocktail
Chilled Florida Orange Juice

BONELESS ROCK CORNISH GAME HEN, Baked With Wild Rice Stuffing 5.50
ROAST LEG OF SPRING LAMB, Mint Jelly 5.25
ROAST PRIME RIBS OF BEEF, Au Jus 5.50

From the Charcoal Broiler

TOP CHOICE SIRLOIN STRIP STEAK, Mushroom Caps 6.15
FLORIDA RED SNAPPER with GULF SHRIMP, Tartar Sauce, Hush Puppies 5.50

Choice of Two
Baked Stuffed Idaho Potato
Green String Beans Amandine Baby Beets in Orange Sauce
Candied Yams Asparagus, Drawn Butter

Tomato and Onion Ring Salad, Amtrak Dressing
or
Pear and Cottage Cheese Salad, Chantilly Dressing

Bran Muffins Hot Dinner Rolls Assorted Bread

Strawberry Shortcake Orange Sherbet
Apple Pie, Cheddar Cheese Baked Florida Grapefruit
Hot Mince Pie Selected Cheeses, Saltines

Coffee Sanka Tea Hot Chocolate Milk

After Dinner Mints

Complimentary Pink Champagne served with above dinners.

A Florida reader who rode the SPECIAL southbound Dec. 23 reported that "all the niceties are there--new magazines in the lounge, all the free pink champagne you can drink at dinner, linen tablecloths, dinner by candlelight, fresh flowers on the tables, free after-dinner mints. There was a movie, played by videotape thru the TV sets, and Bingo games with free breakfast as the prizes. The fashion show has been dropped. The crew seem to be hand-picked--and all are out to please. The train was right on schedule throughout, and 5mins early into Miami."

(contd. on p. 11)

RAIL TRAVELER'S DIARY with: Paul Rayton

ENROUTE ON THE
Capitol Limited

Date: September 8, 1969

"C&O/B&O Want Passengers? You Bet!!" cried the sign on the 3rd story. We were walking into Grand Central Station in Chicago. I glanced at the high clock tower of the soon-to-be-closed station. The clock still worked. A jet plane moved into view in the distant background, like a raven circling the doomed.

We had selected the CAPITOL LIMITED for our trip from Chicago to Washington for one overriding reason: the timetable indicated a "Strata-Dome Lounge (May 27 to Sept. 8)." Reasoning that domes were a rara avis in the eastern part of the country, our decision was simple.

We also considered the relative fares: similar accomodations via Penn Central to Washington would have been $4.30 less expensive but would have included a change of trains at 6am in Harrisburg, Pa., and would not have included the dome car nor the complimentary dinner and breakfast which 1st class B&O ticket holders received.

In fact, judging by the equipment list, the CAPITOL sounded like a totally civilized train, and we couldn't wait for evening and a quiet chat in the Capitol Club lounge, with its magazine library and all.

Our trip on the CAPITOL had actually started two weeks ago, with a phone call from Los Angeles to Chicago to set up our travel plans. It would have taken days (they claimed) for the C&O/B&O in L.A. to make the arrangements, days we didn't have. Thus, to make our plans we had to make long distance calls.

There were three in our party. "You're in luck!" came the voice from Chicago, "I have just three roomettes left." I asked to be put on the waiting list for a bedroom. Additionally, they would not hold space without my money, so I had to write a confirming letter, with money. (Was I a devoted traveler or what?!)

Now inside the station, we checked into the ticket counter, and I inquired about that bedroom. Our name was there and still on the waiting list--behind three other names. No bedroom for us. And how many others had sought bedrooms this day but not wanted to bother with the insecurities of the waiting list?

With extra time before boarding, we looked around the dark, cavernous station. There was a gift shop (of sorts) all closed up. Its stock still hung inside iron-grilled windows. I saw some large shopping bag-like thing proclaiming the thrill of the on-board movies of a bygone day on the B&O.

About 20 people were already at the entry gates, milling about outside a big sign that said, "CAPITOL; Akron-Youngstown-Pittsburgh-Washington-Baltimore; Leaves 3:40pm." About 20 minutes prior to departure the gates were opened for boarding.

The sign had also indicated 4 coaches, 2 sleeping cars, and a diner. We actually found only one sleeper and 3 coaches, plus the diner.

The boarding tracks of Grand Central Station were under a huge domed rainshed, like an overgrown Quonset hut. One of the drawbacks of this design was its inherent attractiveness to the local pigeon population. One of the "residents" took the opportunity, as we walked toward our car, to vent his indignities on our companion, providing a singularly inauspicious beginning to our trip.

As we boarded our "Chessie Starlight"* sleeper, I noted words painted on the trucks of the car, "Lub. Chi. 8-29-69." This sleeping car was recently serviced, it appeared, and seemed to promise a pleasant comfortable ride at the least.

My wife and I had roomettes 1 and 2, right over the wheels. Our companion had roomette 9, at the extreme opposite end of the car. (The bedrooms of this sleeper occupied the central part of the car, with the 10 roomettes divided between the two ends.)

The sleeper had a most inviting appearance. There was a bright red rug on the corridor floor, and a light paint scheme to the interior walls, livening the often drab sleeper visage. It gave the impression of a luxury hotel.

Departure was on time, and we set out for the dome car to watch cityscape meld into farmlands. There was an iron gate across the entrance to the dome itself, and the Conductor promptly told us we couldn't go up there until he had all the tickets. "Where are you sitting, anyway?" he demanded. I explained that we were from the sleeping car. Now he relented, but still insisted that we wait at the base of the stairs until he had all the tickets.

So we waited, missing any views of the Chicago skyline. Finally a Brakeman came and allowed us to go on up.

The "dome" car was one of the major disappointments of the trip. It was a low profile thing, with a maximum superelevation of only about one foot over an average coach. It was a real curiosity piece and was clearly designed to meet height restrictions of tunnels, or bridges, or some Washington electric catenary.

Unfortunately, I couldn't stand erect even standing in the aisle. The large, flat windows were dirty, too. They hadn't been washed in three or four days, it seemed. Because of the design, we were obliged to sit hunched over in the seats in order to see out the tiny side windows of the dome. The dome was uncrowded.

We couldn't quarrel too much, though, for where else would we find any dome in Indiana, Ohio and Pennsylvania?

We ate dinner at a fashionably late hour. The menu was limited to four entrées, but of adequate variety to please most appetites. Roast Sirloin of Beef, au jus, listed at $3.95, inclusive. Or Deluxe Maryland Crab Cakes, tartar sauce ($3.75) and Roast Young Turkey, cranberry sauce ($2.75). A combination Ham and Turkey Sandwich, classified as a dinner (with appetizer, dessert, and beverage) was $2.35. I didn't see anything listed for a la carte service.

The dinner was served "in the C&O/B&O tradition." Whatever that was, we found our Roast Beef to be tender, succulent, subtly spiced. It tasted fine, but was not very hot, worse luck. There was no choice of vegetables; the "snowflake potatoes" tasted like instant, and neither they nor the green beans were hot, either.

The B&O dining cars were sometimes nicknamed "Iron Horse Taverns" and their most distinctive mark was their china serving ware. A motif of "progressive motive power" around the rim of the plate depicted in blue on white drawings various engines from the history of the B&O, including the Tom Thumb (1830), the Mogul (1875), and their first Diesel Electric (1937).

● EQUIPMENT AND SERVICES

* CAPITOL LIMITED

B&O 5 and 6

Chessie Starlight Sleeper (Roomettes, Double Bedrooms, Bedroom Suites—Complimentary Meals)
Washington and Chicago

Reclining Seat Coaches (Lounge Rooms)
Washington and Chicago
(Attendant Service)
Baltimore and Washington

Connecting bus service between Fostoria-Toledo-Detroit.

CAPITOL LIMITED SERVICES

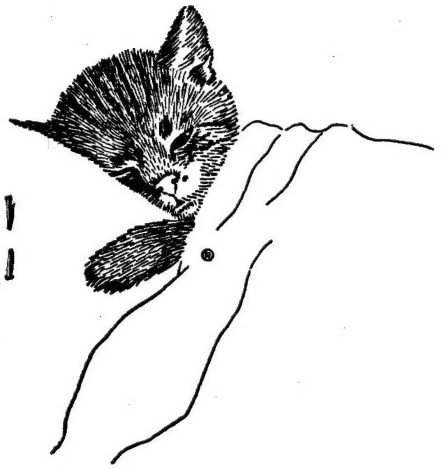
Chessie Tavern
Table d'Hote and A La Carte Meal Service
Complimentary Meals for Chessie Starlight Sleeper passengers.

Iron Horse Tavern
Snacks and Beverages

Capitol Club
Lounge and Beverage Service—Magazine Library and Tobacco Supplies

Strata-Dome Lounge
(May 27 to September 8, 1969)

Complimentary, souvenir pillows for overnight coach passengers.



The central areas of the plates were also illustrated, with various scenes from the B&O system. The design made the plates reminiscent of Delft China, or maybe "Blue Willow" with a railroad motif. It was quite an experience to have a meal served from this place setting. (These plates can be purchased even today by writing B&O Transportation Museum, Baltimore MD 21223.)

After dinner we returned to the dome for more viewing. It was dark by this time and I was surprised to see that the several lumps I had observed earlier on the roof toward the front of the car, and which looked like lights, were lights--and they worked! They were turned on, facing outwards from the car, making an effort to light up the outside night. It was mostly a feeble effort, but it was the thought that counted.

Another disappointment of the CAPITOL LIMITED was the sort of overstatement of the services. The timetable promised a "Chessie Tavern," an "Iron Horse Tavern," and the "Capitol Club." In reality these were all integrated into the one dining car. I never did see any magazines, and the drinks were served from the kitchen, based on a listing in the dinner menu.

My final disappointment of the trip was our sleeping car. Despite that recent lubrication job done on our car, it was noisy as all getout. Every time the train would turn, a long slow CR-E-E-E-E-E-A-K would come from directly beneath our beds as the wheels shifted, maintaining alignment with the tracks. I had noticed the noise when first we left Chicago, but I had reassured myself that use would warm it up while traveling and it would correct itself. It did not, and the noise effectively dispatched any vestigial chances of sleep that night. Over the wheels is bumpy to begin with, and the noise was the last straw.

Late at night, I sat in my roomette and watched as we sped along the Beaver, then the Ohio Rivers. Tiny lights across the river marked homes, factories, towns. I kept wondering where we were, and when would we reach Pittsburgh. And around Pittsburgh, I watched for flames from steel manufacturing, but it was a quiet night for pyrotechnics.

I must have rested some during the night, but when morning came I felt a bit droopy.

While preparing for the new day, we were passing thru the deep backwood of western Maryland and northern West Virginia. Tall trees chopped the early morning sun into a golden strobe light, and we twisted and turned along a stream, passing sleepy hamlet and tiny town in our rush to the big city. It was hard to believe that in under two hours the landscape would make a transition from these mountain country shacks to the buildings of our nation's Capitol.

We were impressed with the beauty, but our breakfasts were a more substantial way to get set for Washington. The food was ample and hot--and served on that blue china again. Prices (for those in coach) ran from $1.60 (two eggs) to $1.90 (two eggs with ham or bacon). Prices included juice, toast, and beverage. Hot or cold cereal was available a la carte.

The diner was somewhat more crowded this morning, commuter coffee-drinking types riding in from Martinsburg and Harpers Ferry. There had been about 50 "long haul" passengers.

* The distinction between C&O and B&O trademarks had become somewhat blurred with their latter-day joint operations.

Approaching Washington was quite impressive. Looking forward from the vestibule, you could see that we were headed directly toward the Capitol Building. We arrived right on time at 9:15am.

I would grade the track "C+" and the general attitude of the crew as "fair."

Interestingly, we apparently rode the last regular run of a dome car on the CAPITOL LIMITED. It was the last run for the summer season, as shown in the time table, but we assumed it would reappear in summer, 1970. It never did.

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LETTERS

(More replies to RTN's reader questionnaire)

PARK RIDGE, ILL.: Altho I've only seen a half dozen issues, it is easy to observe the improvement the newsletter has made over the months. The material covered remains of tremendous interest to all but the most hard-nosed steam-first-last-and-always type and the freight-only Hilton-esque type of railfans. RTN has helped to make me and most of our organization more knowledgeable about rail passenger service as it is now outside of the immediate Chicago area.

SCHENECTADY, N.Y.: When I go to college next year I will have to stop subscribing to several publications (I will need the money for college). But I will never stop subscribing to RTN. As long as you publish RTN, I will be a loyal supporter of it. RTN has grown on me, and has become my favorite magazine.

ATLANTA, GEO.: Regarding suggestions--I have none. I like the magazine, look forward to its arrival, commend you for the interest you maintain in people, applaud you for being neither the voice of the industry nor the past, I will be happy to pay you more to keep you first class (in all ways), and I don't miss Capt. Amtrack.

MILLERSBURG, OHIO: It seems to me that you are filling a need with the format and mechanics you are using right now. If I'm a typical subscriber, I turn to (other magazines) for pretty pictures. What I want from you is fast news, current rumors, accurate equipment lists, passenger counts, "on time" performances, continuous pecking away at the highway lobby, and a minimum of editorial comment; all served up with a dash of humor, whimsy, and a trace of nostalgia. This is exactly what I'm getting now, and I'm perfectly satisfied!

EUGENE, ORE.: RTN's most valuable function is in filling the voids left by other railroad publications. The difference between RTN and (other publications) is not entirely in content, but also in the frequency and timeliness of news dissemination. Because of this big plus in getting news out while it is fresh, the continued use of first class mail should not even be questioned. Having rated timely news value as RTN's most valuable asset, I must consider the additional feature material such as Paul Rayton's train reviews purely as a bonus. I do not always agree with Mr. Rayton, but nevertheless thoroughly enjoy his observations after first reviewing an issue's news content. I do not feel that RTN should ignore the pre-Amtrak era. In fact, for a thorough understanding of just where Amtrak is today, background features on earlier passenger operations would offer a valuable perspective.

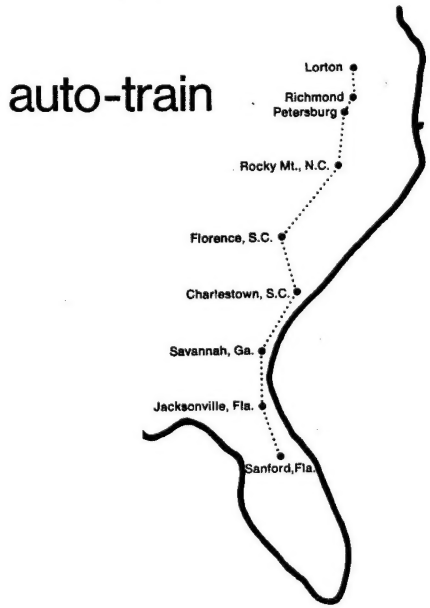
LAS CRUCES, N.M.: Just a note to tell you that your newsletter is well worth the price, and I would pay more if necessary.

(contd. from p. 6)

The SILVER METEOR came in 52mins late, had the usual--3 E units, NYC mail car (1st class mail, NY-Miami, which is unusual), 3 RF&P coaches, 2 SCL coaches, 2 SCL slumbercoaches (normally one), SCL lounge, diner & 3 sleepers, SCL Boston-Miami sleeper & coach. Fifteen sleeper passengers were aboard for the first run, 13 of whom came all the way from Boston.

The CHAMPION was 35mins late, and was similar to the METEOR, with 3 exceptions: There was 1 slumbercoach. There was an Amtrak sleeper-lounge, the Palm Beach (the ex-ACL car had received a dark blue window band and the Amtrak logo). On the rear were 4 B&O coaches being deadheaded to Richmond for the football special 2 days later.

The Auto-Train was 2hrs late leaving Richmond, and was pulled by 2 of Auto-Train's own GE U36B's. Only the first 6 cars were in Auto-Train colors--steam generator car, 3 full-length domes, kitchen and buffet cars. Then followed 3 UP sleepers, 2 Santa Fe sleepers, the 3 RF&P sleepers, 8 Southern Railway auto-carrying bi-level enclosed box-express cars, and an SCL caboose. Apparently Auto-Train is being faced with a greater demand for sleeper space than anticipated. The train is listed as #1&2 in SCL's Dec. 17 employee timetable.



WE VISITED Auto-Train's new terminal at Lorton, Va., for the first time Dec. 27 and came away very impressed. First, let it be said that "Mr. Surly" does not exist at Auto-Train. Both the terminal and on-train employees were young and enthusiastic, and each arriving passenger was greeted with a smile.

As of mid-December, a permanent terminal building was in place, as well as a long, brightly lit station platform. The small, cozy terminal features a lobby-ticketing area with wall-to-wall carpet, as well as offices and restrooms. Passengers drive up in front of the terminal and turn their autos over to an attendant. As the middle of the passenger section of the train is at the terminal, there's no long hike from auto to sleeper space or coach seat.

Many passengers arrive 2-3hrs before train time, so loading began about 4:30pm. Autos were driven carefully into the Car-Port box cars, which were parked on a track between the passenger equipment and the RF&P main. When all trackage is complete, autos will be loaded on 3 stub tracks immediately in front of the terminal. As early as 5pm, passengers were enjoying cocktails and the complimentary buffet. The FLORIDA SPECIAL shot past, but few saw it because of the Car-Port cars.

The train had the usual new Auto-Train locos, 7 Car-Port cars, 2 full-length coach domes, one with a bar-lounge below and one with a snack bar, one full-length night club dome, kitchen car, buffet car, 4 UP sleepers, 4 Santa Fe sleepers, 2 UP coaches, and steam car. The dome coaches have huge new seats with leg rests--probably the most comfortable seating on any public transportation in the world. One side of the aisle has only one seat.

Shortly after 7pm the last passengers arrived. A few passengers on "standby" were accommodated. The RF&P road crew assembled the train and had it ready on the main before 8pm. Departure was on time. 168 happy passengers and 54 autos

were heading for Florida the fun way. The RF&P 4-man road crew are handling all switching at Lorton for the first two months, after which Auto-Train will do its own switching. The conductor had no uniform, as Auto-Train handles all tickets and reservations. The locomotives have large fuel tanks and thus have to make only one fuel stop—Florence, S.C. Presently they are not fueled at either end terminal.

Left at the terminal was some standby equipment—Southern Railway rack cars and an RF&P caboose. The cabcoses are used only when rack cars are used. Those CALIFORNIA ZEPHYR dome coaches are at Pullman-Standard in Chicago, undergoing refurbishing. Use of the UP leg-rest coaches is only temporary, as more full-length ex-SAN FRANCISCO CHIEF domes are on the way.

A typical northbound ride on the Auto-Train was described by Dr. Charles Dunn of Florida (Dec. 22): "There were ten—count them 10—beautiful girls on the train who see to your needs. The night club provides entertainment in the way of a singer, piano player, and electric guitarist. Red shag rugs are in the sleepers, and standard new carpet throughout the rest of the train right up to the bottom edge of the windows. The bathrooms have been redone with new formica cabinets and airplane-type self-contained toilets installed. Fresh poinsettia plants were just inside the door of each sleeper.

"The seats in the night club dome have been replaced with tables and widely spaced soft chairs. The seats of the high level domes (ex-Santa Fe high level lounges) have been replaced with widely spaced airline-type seats. New upholstery is on all seats in the train.

(See the menu portion of the Auto-Train passenger brochure reproduced here.)

"The meals were buffet type. All food was free, including sandwiches served airline style at 11pm and coffee all night if you wanted it. No tipping was allowed, and refused if you tried.

"Our train carried about 200 non-rail types who were amazed and extremely happy with the accommodations.

welcome aboard! To make your trip more enjoyable, this folder explains some of the features of Auto-Train's unique service.

buffet Auto-Train invites you to enjoy our complimentary buffet dinner. You can go to the buffet car whenever you like after you come on aboard.

In the buffet car you will find an array of appetizers, salads, and cold cuts. The special entrees for southbound passengers are Lobster Newburg and Beef Stroganoff. Passengers from Florida to Virginia will enjoy Fillet Wellington Froid or Medallion of Lobster Bellevue. Traveling in either direction, your meal will be made complete with a choice of desserts and pastries.

In the morning you will be served a continental breakfast at your seat. You can request it anytime you're ready, after 6:30 A.M.

cocktails, snacks, etc. Before your dinner, or after, you may wish to relax in your seat and enjoy a cocktail or after-dinner drink. Beverages and complimentary hors d'oeuvres are available from the bar in the car where you are riding. See the reverse side of this folder for the list of items available from the bar.

"The train runs non-stop except for SCL crew changes, and these are done in the yards, bypassing the terminals. It takes about 15-20mins after arrival for the first cars to be unloaded.

"Enthusiasm is evident in all connected with the operation, and for one who has ridden many miles on the rails, it was hard to believe I was on a train."

Auto-Train is basically sold out thru Easter, with some dates still open. Other dates may be re-opened for sale as equipment becomes available. Sales for August, 1972 are going great guns. There is a great demand for sleeper space, and Auto-Train plans to sell space by room type after equipment assignments are finalized. Just before Christmas, Auto-Train ran a record consist of 27 cars.

The Auto-Train terminal is easy to find, being immediately adjacent to I-95's Lorton exit. Land has been cleared, and you can now see the terminal from the Interstate's northbound lanes.

Auto-Train looks like a solid success from every angle. And Wall Street agrees, since the stock has gone from $10 to $46. 45

ACTIVE STOCKS

	Volume	3:30 Bid	Chg.
Rank Organ A ADR	107,000	25¼	+ 1
NLT Corp	86,200	34	+ ⅜
Auto Train Corp.	80,600	45¼	+ 5¼

Mixed Train of Thoughts

THAT MOVIE filmed last June in SP dome lounge 3601 and other cars has been renamed "Chandler" and has just been released (see RTN #15). The train sequences run about 10 mins..... THE ICC approved Dec. 28 the merger plan of Illinois Central and Gulf, Mobile & Ohio. The merged railroad would be called Illinois Central Gulf Railroad..... SANTA FE cars have now largely replaced the SP cars on the SUNSET LIMITED. The automat car (plus diner) still runs on the train. It carried up to 7 sleepers just before Christmas..... CALIFORNIA GOVERNOR Reagan Jan. 6 proposed creation of a state Dept. of Transportation, combining the depts. of Public Works and Aeronautics. It would oversee all transportation, including mass transit. But will it have any other than air and highway interests in its makeup?..... S.F. EXAMINER ran another anti-Amtrak editorial Jan. 6, featuring Mr. Biaggini's deathless words (see p. 5). The Examiner's own comment about Amtrak: "Oh wow"..... * * *

SAN DIEGAN #777 on Dec. 26 (courtesy of Robert J. Swan): riders in hi-level coaches, 147; in lo-level coaches, 46; in lounge (with music system working!), 20; in restrooms, 7; total: 220..... COAST STARLIGHT pressed into holiday service SP sleeper 9011 with bedrooms, compartments and drawingrooms..... THANKSGIVING WEEKEND up to 200 riders were turned away daily from the SAN DIEGANS due to small trains. Trains were packed, with only 6 coaches, when Santa Fe used to run 16..... WESTERN REGIONAL Manager of Amtrak is Robert T. Edgar, a native of Greenwood, Louisiana. Lives in Arcadia, Calif., with wife and 21-year-old daughter ..... ANNOUNCEMENT CAME Jan. 5 that Amtrak will run a "fun train" from L.A. to Las Vegas starting Jan. 21. It is expected to carry 300 people each weekend. The Reno Chamber of Commerce has long sponsored fun trains to its city from S.F. area, and have carried about 400 each run. SP didn't want to run them after Amtrak began, but have recently resumed..... * * *

ILLINOIS ZEPHYR (#347) ran 15 coaches plus 2 snack coaches Jan. 2, with 365 on board leaving Chicago..... EMPIRE BUILDER derailed shortly before Christmas westbound somewhere in the wilds of the northern Rockies. Two end cars, a UP sleeper and BN's "Little Chief Mountain," substituting for the usual dome lounge, overturned emerging from a tunnel..... SMOG ENTHUSIASTS who want information to counter the highway lobby: find it in excellent special report in the L.A. Times Jan. 6..... AUTO-TRAIN'S address, to answer reader inquiries, is 1801 K Street N.W., Washington D.C. 20006..... AMERICAN EXPRESS decals popped up on SP's Oakland station, much to the surprise of all, during the holiday season. First time (ever?) you can charge tickets there, but can't use cards to charge meals on trains. Santa Fe office in San Francisco still uses Master Charge and Rail Travel Card..... WE'VE NOTICED a great increase in the number of passengers bringing pets along in sleepers since Amtrak mentioned the possibility in its Nov. 14 timetable..... AMTRAK'S DECEMBER timetable has been delayed until early January. A separate December schedule for the East Coast was put out in conjunction with Eastern railroads..... D.J. RUSSELL, board chairman of SP, went to Rosebowl Game in Southern California with 2 private cars on the 3-hr late running COAST STARLIGHT/DAYLIGHT Dec. 31, and his beautiful car "Sunset" had those huge windows rocked along the way. Return was on the late-running STARLIGHT Jan. 2..... CITY OF SF no longer stops at Truckee, gateway to Lake Tahoe playland. Unless Chairman Russell or other SP dignitary has his private car on the end, as on Dec. 25, when it was set out there for a few days of relaxation..... FEW PEOPLE realize, reports an Amtrak man, how close U.S. passenger service was to a state of complete collapse when Amtrak took over.....

Urban-Suburban Transit

NEW YORK SUBWAY CHAOS AVOIDED

A strike that would have idled New York City's subways and buses was averted 2 hours before a 5am deadline January 1, when negotiators for the Transit Workers Union agreed on a new contract with pay increases that will almost certainly send the city fare up to 35 cents. On January 4 the State Legislature approved a transit package to pay in part for the raises. Besides fare increases, it requires toll increases on New York's bridges and tunnels. These went into effect January 6, along with protests from commuters and from auto clubs. The previous day, the Long Island Rail Road announced a plan to raise fares by about 20 percent. A public hearing on them will be held January 17.

ROHR STRIKE WREAKING HAVOC WITH BART

The continuing strike at Rohr Industries, Chula Vista, Calif., builders of rail cars for the Bay Area Rapid Transit system, is delaying the opening of the system, and each month of delay beyond March will cost BART $150,000 in engineering expenses. Reluctantly, BART has decided to use the prototype cars it now has to make debugging tests of the automatic control equipment, rather than wait for the actual rolling stock to arrive. This move will save some otherwise wasted time, but is less desirable than testing the actual cars that riders will ride.

THREE COMPETING PLANS FOR LOS ANGELES TRANSIT MORASS

Los Angeles, the major city with the unique problem—no workable public transportation—, is now able to collect money, via a gasoline sales tax, to correct its problem. But there is yet no agreement on how to spend the money to create workable transit. The ill-named Southern California Rapid Transit District, which runs sluggish buses around the L.A. Basin, wants to use transit funds for more buses. City planners have an alternate plan for a $2.4 billion, 100-mile pollution- and noise-free rail system to be finished by 1990. Meanwhile, city councilmen and others are calling for a return to use of the former Pacific Electric lines and rights-of-way for a faster and less costly solution. These would tie in with other Amtrak routes.

SUBWAY AGENCY BALKS AT COMMUTER RAIL OPERATION

The Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority's general manager, Jackson Graham, gave NARP a "no" response December 31 to its request that WMATA operate commuter trains into Washington from suburban Maryland and Virginia. Graham claimed WMATA has no authority to run any public transportation system. NARP Executive Director Joseph Vranich replied "That is not a reason for failure to operate a commuter rail system. Operating authority is exactly what we want to give WMATA." NARP plans to develop legislation to create a new Authority whose sole purpose will be to operate commuter trains.

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(continued from page 2)

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QUOTES OF THE WEEK ***

"There is no market for long-distance, inter-city passenger transportation by rail. People just won't ride it, and they won't pay what they should to support the service. I don't think the taxpayers of this country should put up 300 or 400 million dollars a year to support such a service if the demand is not there."

—SP president B. F. Biaggini, U.S. News and World Report, January 3

"It is my conviction that the axes are being sharpened for 1973. In 1973, Administration officials contemplate that all train service except the Northeast corridor's will be discontinued."

—NARP's Anthony Haswell, quoted in Passenger Train Journal, Fall 1971

SLIP OF THE MONTH CLUB ***

"It's true that a number of railroads, including the Union Pacific, Southern Pacific, Norfolk & Western, and Southern, are basking in relative prospertiy."

—Wall Street Journal, January 6

(It's not true and you know it.)

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QUOTES OF THE WEEK ***

"There is no market for long-distance, inter-city passenger transportation by rail. People just won't ride it, and they won't pay what they should to support the service. I don't think the taxpayers of this country should put up 300 or 400 million dollars a year to support such a service if the demand is not there."

—SP president B. F. Biaggini, U.S. News and World Report, January 3

"It is my conviction that the axes are being sharpened for 1973. In 1973, Administration officials contemplate that all train service except the Northeast corridor's will be discontinued."

—NARP's Anthony Haswell, quoted in Passenger Train Journal, Fall 1971

SLIP OF THE MONTH CLUB ***

"It's true that a number of railroads, including the Union Pacific, Southern Pacific, Norfolk & Western, and Southern, are basking in relative prospertiy."

—Wall Street Journal, January 6

(It's not true and you know it.)